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FM AMCONSUL CURACAO
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RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0130
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0218
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 0015
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN PRIORITY 0008
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN PRIORITY 0048
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0010
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO PRIORITY 0036
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PRIORITY 0120

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CURACAO 000336

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [NA](#) [AA](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN COME "A-COURTIN'" TO CURACAO

CLASSIFIED BY: ROBERT SORENSON, COM, AMCONSUL CURACAO, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

MESSAGE DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION

11. (C) Summary. A high level Venezuelan Navy delegation led by CNO VADM Luis Chirinos Medina met with RADM Frank Sijtsma, Commander of Dutch Forces in the Caribbean, April 3. Sijtsma characterized the meeting as a "good step" in furthering naval cooperation with Venezuela in a follow up conversation with COM. Among the results of the meeting were:

- Venezuelan agreement to send observers to Caribbean Lion;
- Venezuela will "try" to participate in Caribbean Lion, perhaps providing a tanker;
- the revival of a cooperative agreement on information sharing between coast guards (previously held up by the Dutch MFA);
- an agreement to undertake a joint naval exercise this fall;
- and,
- enhancing navy-to-navy cooperation, including possible officer exchanges.

Also raised on the margins was continuing Venezuelan distrust of the US Forward Operating Location with complaints that U.S. flights are frequently entering Venezuelan air space and concern over the presence of the USS George Washington in the region. Sijtsma claimed to have fended off complaints about the carrier and told the Venezuelans that if they have information about intrusions into Venezuelan airspace from aircraft from the FOLs, they should raise them. COM commented that if there were complaints about U.S. flights, it would be more appropriate to raise them at the US Embassy in Caracas. End Summary.

12. (C) A high level Venezuelan Navy delegation led by CNO VADM Luis Chirinos Medina and accompanied by two other admirals, three captains as well as Venezuelan foreign affairs advisor Ambassador Palacios, formerly stationed in The Hague. Dutch Ambassador Neyerheis from Caracas and Dutch MFA representative Karel de Vey Mestdagh also participated. Sijtsma characterized the meeting as a good step forward and opined that it was advantageous to try to cooperate with the Venezuelan navy and coast guard.

Understandings Reached

13. (C) The Venezuelans agreed to send observers for Caribbean Lion who will be on one of the Dutch vessels. In addition, the Venezuelans will "try" to participate in the exercise as well. Sijtsma thought it very possible that the Venezuelans would provide a tanker (currently in dry dock) for the exercise which would provide cheap fuel. At this late stage, Sijtsma felt that a tanker still could be easily incorporated into the exercise.

14. (C) A previously negotiated information sharing agreement between their mutual coast guards was dusted off and will be revived. Sijtsma noted that the agreement had been moribund for a couple of years due to Dutch MFA insistence not to move forward on it. In addition, the Venezuelans discussed a document on intensified naval cooperation they were drafting. It was agreed that this document when completed could provide a blueprint for further discussions on enhanced cooperation. The Venezuelans also raised the possibility of officer exchanges, but Sijtsma was doubtful that this would be doable. Finally, it was agreed that planning would begin on a joint bilateral naval exercise in the autumn which would include a Dutch ship visit to one of the ports previously closed to them.

"They hate the FOLs"

15. (C) Sijtsma said that on the margins of the meeting the Venezuelans reiterated their vehement dislike for the U.S. FOLs and felt they were aimed at Venezuela with counter-narcotics as only a side mission. As "proof" of this, the Venezuelans claimed that there were frequent overflights of Venezuelan territory. Sijtsma underscored the important counter-narcotics role of the FOLs, but offered to investigate Venezuelan overflight complaints IF provided details. Sijtsma underscored to COM that it "would not be good" if US planes were indeed routinely violating Venezuelan airspace. COM responded that this was not our policy. The one incident of which he was aware actually involved crossing into Venezuelan FIRS and not territory, but agreed that any claimed intrusion into Venezuelan airspace by aircraft flying from the FOL should be investigated. COM added that if the Venezuelans had a complaint about U.S. aircraft it would be more appropriate for them to raise this directly with our Embassy in Caracas which Sijtsma acknowledged. Also raised on the margins was the Venezuelans concern about Partnership of the Americas and the presence of the USS George Washington.

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Sijtsma indicated he dismissed the concern without further comment.

16. (C) Comment: As for the Venezuelans, they will continue to try to get the U.S. military out of Curacao and enhance their economic leverage. Keeping our activities at the FOLs clearly within the confines of the agreement and maintaining transparency with the Dutch should help ensure continued Dutch support for the FOLs. Local support for the FOLs remains strong. Over time the "success" of this meeting may well have a hollow ring for the locals as it may revive concerns about Dutch steadfastness. Perceptions of the cooperation (or lack thereof) with Partnership of the Americas will likely not be missed by our interlocutors here who will draw the conclusion that the Dutch paid for this "success," by supposedly distancing themselves from the US. We should not be drawn into a bidding war with Venezuela for local affection, but, with a new Netherlands Antilles government now settling in, we will need to engage more fully on broader areas of cooperation and interest to them.

SORENSEN